ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

If there is anything virtuous, lovely, or of good report in these pages, John Talbot deserves a good share of the credit. Without his encouragement and example, this book likely would not exist; until he invited me—and other undergraduates studying "Classics and the English Tradition" under his tutelage—to demonstrate my understanding of the epic form by composing one hundred lines of my own, I had yet to commit any of my ideas about Joseph Smith to paper. Those initial lines were terrible, and John, who is one of the best poets of his generation, did me the great service of saying so. But stubbornness and hubris drove me on in one revision after another, and I hope this final product is a more felicitous representation of all I learned from him than that first, wretched draft.

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what it might mean to forge Joseph's story within the confines of this particular genre.

Two early readers provided encouragement without which I might have abandoned the epic entirely. I will forever be grateful to the late Clayton Christensen. In 2007, he made the time to read an early draft and provided feedback nurturing my belief in the poem's future. And some years later, Kylan Rice, who is a far more gifted writer than I, persuaded me to pluck my epic off the shelf and return to it with a seriousness of purpose. The best of friends, he volunteered to read it in draft form several times and persuaded me to think more about each line as a discrete unit.

When it came time to finish and pitch the manuscript, I was encouraged by Zachary Davis and Justin Collings, talented writers whose epics I hope to see bound on my shelves, alongside this book. Alison Syring took a chance on *Joseph* even though the University of Illinois Press hasn't traditionally published much in the way of creative writing. Without her advocacy, this manuscript might never have seen the light of day. Christopher Jones and the other advance readers she identified provided fantastic feedback and kind appraisals that spurred the project along. Others at the Press have been similarly wonderful to work with: Leigh Ann Cowan, Jennie Fisher, Renee Cote, Charrice Jones, Jennifer Argo, Jim Proefrock, and Jason Gabbert. Jason's cover for the book is so good that I have wondered whether my words can possibly live up to the expectations of greatness his cover cultivates. Of course, Jason's work features the fabulous illustrations of Godwin, who has been an amazing creative partner: visionary, responsive, generous, and professional. I'm so grateful to see my words come to life through his art and hope to work with him again in the future.

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poem's aims and structure. Each of his siblings has proudly described me to friends or strangers as a poet, providing me with ample motivation to prove them honest.

For many years, Alana saw every line before anyone else, and she believed that the poem would eventually be published even when I did not. I love her and have thought about how she would respond to a given word or line throughout the writing process. She is not a muse, but a help meet for my best, celestial self, who delivered me from depression and cultivated my highest, holiest aspirations.

Only my father Kenneth believed in *Joseph* more fervently than she did. For more than a decade, whenever we spoke on the phone, he asked me how the poem was coming. As I finished each new section, he asked to read it, then wrote back with a list of questions and suggestions. He loved to write poetry himself, and although Rich was the more immediate influence, he is the fountainhead from which our familial love of the written word flows. Even after his death in 2021, I have felt myself motivated both by his memory and his presence. I love him and can't wait for our next chance to talk poetry.

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